

# Voucher-groucher Crew H slams Milwaukee

By MARIA ALVAREZ

Schools Chancellor Rudy Crew blasted private-school vouchers in Milwaukee — home of the nation's acclaimed voucher program — where he spoke to several hundred university faculty members.

Crew received a standing ovation for his attack on Milwaukee's alternative education program, which is revered by Mayor Giuliani and has created a huge rift between the two Rudys.

Crew told his audience at the annual African-American in Education Conference at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee this week that "at times, I want to go to the map and cut out Milwaukee."

"You're causing me pure hell in New York," said Crew, who threatened to resign earlier this year if

the mayor continued to push for a private-school voucher system, which uses taxpayer dollars for private or religious school tuition.

"I feel badly about what happened here in Milwaukee," said Crew, who called vouchers "a proxy for real investment."

More than 8,000 kids in Milwaukee attend private schools at taxpayer's expense. Crew criticized the program for serving only one tenth of the student population in the Wisconsin city.

"The chancellor's speech was very inspirational,"

said DuWayne Brooks, a conference organizer. "There was overwhelming support for Dr. Crew. Not everybody in Milwaukee supports vouchers."

Back in the Big Apple, voucher supporters raved about the Milwaukee program.

"Everyone knows the Milwaukee program is a success," said Board of Ed member Jerry Cammarata. "Anyone who rejects vouchers is a coward and is not willing to have competition and innovation in education."

Anthony Coles, senior ad-

viser to the mayor, said the Milwaukee program is "a terrific innovation."

"The mayor is very clear that he wants a pilot voucher program in a school district because there is a demand for it in the city," said Coles.

Voucher critics in New York claim the state constitution prohibits the use of taxpayer dollars for religious or private school education.

## Rudy Crew, Boo Hoo Hoo

Here's another reason to love school vouchers: Rudy Crew hates 'em.

The city schools chancellor, speaking Thursday at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, unloaded on vouchers — which pay private-school tuition for 8,000 poor kids in Milwaukee.

"I oftentimes want to go to the map and cut out Milwaukee," Crew said. "You are causing me pure hell in New York."

Would that it were so. The educators are so well-entrenched in New York that vouchers aren't a remote possibility here — at least until long after their utility has been proved everywhere else.

But the need for alternatives to the status quo — and to Crew himself — is getting more glaringly obvious by the day.

On Wednesday, the state Education Department informed New York City that 45 percent of its public-school ninth-graders right now can't pass a test needed for high-school graduation. On the same day, the schools chancellor actually gave himself a B-plus job-performance rating.

Crew has been on the job for four years now — and for all the early promise, nothing really has changed in New York City's public schools.

There are bright spots in the system — and not just a few elementary schools in upscale neighborhoods and the elite high schools — but they were there long before Crew arrived.

More important, there is no discernible evidence that the rest of the system is any more capable of producing young men and women equipped to participate fully in an information-age economy than it was before he got here.

The system is, if anything, less capable than it was.

As if the point needed to be made again, on Wednesday Albany announced that 45

percent of the kids taking a state Regents English exam failed to pass it.

And even that number is misleading: The Education Department set the passing bar at 55 percent in an effort to ease into the new test. If it had been 65 percent — the real and honest cut-off point — six out of 10 kids taking it would have flunked.

There is no reference point here — it's the first time that the test has been required — and thus there is no way to measure "progress." But all the other benchmarks — standardized tests, dropout rates and so forth — demonstrate there has been no academic progress under Crew.

The chancellor and his fellow educators blame the stagnation on lack of money — in Milwaukee, for example, Crew termed vouchers "a proxy for real investment."

In fact, the city schools have experienced massive spending increases during the chancellor's tenure.

All in all, state aid to the city's schools is up more than \$1.2 billion over the past four years — from \$3.3 billion to \$4.5 billion. That's an increase of some 36 percent, which is *three times* the rate of inflation — and if Crew can't make do with this, he ought to hang 'em up for that reason alone.

There is, moreover, every indication that the Board of Ed is going to get another cash bath in the next state budget.

There is, however, no reasonable expectation of improved classroom performance — and for this, Crew must be held accountable.

Not that anybody knows where the chancellor actually is at any given moment. If he's not on the West Coast, looking for another job, he's in Milwaukee — criticizing proposed alternatives to the failed status quo.

He can't put up, so why doesn't he shut up?